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U.K. Defense Policy

Modern Forces for the Modern World

by Michael O'Neill

Conclusions

- The United Kingdom's recent Strategic Defence Review (SDR) builds on a process of military transformation underway since the end of the Cold War. In contrast to earlier reforms, the SDR is firmly rooted in foreign policy and a clear intellectual framework for assessing the future size and shape of U.K. armed forces.
- The United Kingdom is a major European state, with a fundamental interest in Europe's security, but with interests that are not confined to Europe. Elsewhere, U.K. interests are most likely to be affected by events in the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean.
- An increasingly unstable international environment requires smaller but frequent military operations, often simultaneous and sometimes prolonged, including peace support and humanitarian operations which may be militarily very demanding.
- Future U.K. armed forces must be able to conduct either an operation similar in size and duration to the Gulf War, or two concurrent medium-scale operations.
- U.K. armed forces will be restructured and modernized to be more deployable, sustainable mobile, and flexible, including:
 - a properly manned, well-trained, and better equipped front line;
 - greater emphasis on joint forces with enhanced capabilities;
 - improved power projection, logistics, and other support.
- Army personnel levels will rise by 3,300, mainly in signals, engineer, and logistics areas, the Royal Navy will reduce by 1,400, and the Royal Air Force will remain unchanged.
- Savings made from support and procurement reforms and program reductions will fund substantial new investment and modernization.

Strategic Defence Review

The U.K. Government launched a Strategic Defence Review immediately after its election in May 1997. The parameters came from the Government's manifesto: strong defense, security based on NATO, and retention of Trident missile submarines combined with multinational arms control. The results appeared in July 1998 in a white paper, *Strategic Defence Review: Modern Forces for the Modern World*. Defence Secretary George Robertson called the review radical, "modernising and reshaping our armed forces to meet the needs of the 21st century, reflecting a changing world in which the confrontation of the Cold War has been replaced by a complex mixture of uncertainty and instability."

Since the end of the Cold War, like other Allies, the United Kingdom had progressively reduced defense spending and force levels. During 1990-98 the armed forces decreased from 315,000 to 210,000 personnel. Conventionally armed submarine numbers decreased from 28 to 12, destroyers and frigates from 48 to 35, infantry battalions from 55 to 40. Tank numbers had fallen by 45 percent, RAF aircraft numbers by 30 percent.

But there had been no comprehensive review of military roles and structures. Cuts were made roughly proportionately rather than by shifting resources strategically to reflect new requirements. The increasing frequency of extended overseas deployments, notably in the Balkans, revealed weaknesses in logistic support and an increasing over-stretching of military forces.

The SDR was the first fundamental re-appraisal of the U.K.'s post-Cold War defense posture. The starting point was a policy framework devised by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. That was converted into eight Missions for the armed forces that were further developed into 28 Military Tasks. The forces, capabilities, equipment, and support needed were then assessed.

A further innovation was the open and inclusive process. Extensive consultation took place with parliament, the public, outside specialists, and defense personnel through open seminars led by Ministers. The MOD also received hundreds of written submissions, as well as advice from an expert panel, academics, industrialists, trade unionists, scientists, and others. There was close liaison with Allies, for example, talks with the U.S. Department of Defense Program Analysis and Evaluation staff and other participants in the Quadrennial Defense Review.

U.K. Security Priorities and the Strategic Environment

The setting of the SDR is that Britain is a major European state, whose economic and political future is as part of Europe. Britain has a fundamental interest in Europe's security and stability and in NATO effectiveness as a collective political and military instrument to underpin them. European security is also reinforced by other means, including conflict-prevention by the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, and European Union (EU) success in extending prosperity and stability, especially through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).

But Britain's interests are not confined to Europe. Its economy is founded on international trade—U.K. exports form a higher proportion of GDP than for the United States, Japan, Germany, or France. Outside Europe, British interests are most likely to be affected by events in the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean. So, U.K. national security and prosperity also depend on promoting wider international stability, freedom, and economic development, and on the work of multinational organizations, above all

the United Nations.

There is today no direct military threat to the United Kingdom or Western Europe, nor is one likely to re-emerge. But this cannot be taken for granted. NATO enlargement and defense cooperation programs will help strengthen the trend. Nonetheless, instability in Europe, as in the Balkans, or beyond, as in Africa, can threaten U.K. security directly or indirectly. With weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and missile technology proliferating, dangerous regimes elsewhere threaten vital economic interests and international stability. It is noteworthy that since 1990 more British troops have been on active operations at any one time than during the Cold War.

Future Roles and Shape of U.K. Armed Forces

Hitherto U.K. defense planning was based on three Defence Roles: protecting the United Kingdom and Dependent Territories, insuring against major external threats to the United Kingdom and Allies, and contributing to wider international peace and stability. Over time, this framework has become inadequate, for example, giving insufficient prominence to the range of operations under Role Three. The SDR rectifies this with eight new Defence Missions, giving a more accurate and balanced statement of the roles of the armed forces and a clearer basis for planning. Inclusion of Defence Diplomacy reflects the importance to U.K. security of building and maintaining trust and preventing conflict. The Missions also anticipate growing calls for contributions to international peace support and humanitarian operations, some of which could be militarily very demanding.

These missions include:

1. Peacetime Security
2. Security of the Overseas Territories
3. Defence Diplomacy
4. Support to Wider British Interests
5. Peace Support and Humanitarian Operations
6. Regional Conflict outside the NATO Area
7. Regional Conflict inside the NATO Area
8. Strategic Attack on NATO.

A crucial innovation of the SDR was the rigorous intellectual framework used to assess future force structures. First, changes in the nature of future operations were considered. In place of an intense conflict of relatively short duration, future operations might be smaller in scale but longer lasting and farther afield, with little local infrastructure. There would be more need for expeditionary forces requiring increased lift, logistic support, and extended communications. At sea the emphasis would move from large-scale, open-ocean operations toward littoral operations and force projection. The increasing tempo of land operations would demand greater deployability and mobility, precision and range of firepower, and force protection. Air superiority and air defense would be vital for many deployed operations, requiring a continued balanced mix of aircraft but more emphasis on precision missiles and transport aircraft.

Second, a specific benchmark was adopted to plan the size and shape of the force, based on planning assumptions about required scales of effort, readiness levels, and endurance and concurrency of operations. The yardstick was that the United Kingdom should be able to meet continuing commitments such as in Northern Ireland and *either* conduct operations similar in scale and duration to the Gulf War (when the United Kingdom deployed an armored division, 26 major warships, and over 80 combat

aircraft) *or* undertake a more extended deployment on a lesser scale, as in Bosnia, and retain the capacity for a second major deployment, for example, a combat brigade and appropriate naval and air forces.

The SDR conclusions reflect an international environment that is in many ways more demanding. Undertaking smaller but frequent, often simultaneous and sometimes prolonged operations can be harder than preparing for a single, worst-case conflict. There will be more use of armed forces to deter or manage crises. They must have the military capabilities and flexibility to respond rapidly and effectively to a wider range of tasks.

The restructured armed forces will have a new generation of equipment, including attack helicopters, long-range precision munitions, digitized command and control, new aircraft carriers, submarines, escorts, the Eurofighter aircraft, and a successor to the Tornado. Other capabilities planned or entering service include ASTOR airborne ground surveillance radar, Phoenix unmanned target acquisition vehicles, Cobra artillery-locating radar, and Tracer battlefield reconnaissance vehicles. New information and communication systems will integrate sensors, weapons, platforms, and logistics (e.g., a secure intranet for deployed operations), the Bowman combat radio, and upgraded satellite communications. Force structure and the balance of investment between weapons, platforms, and other systems will be adjusted as new capabilities come available.

Procurement and Support

The SDR will also bring major changes in equipment procurement and defense support to secure greater economy, efficiency, and effectiveness.

In procurement, separate approaches will be introduced for major and minor projects and commodity and other low-risk items, and a through-life approach to projects will be adopted, covering both acquisition and in-service support. Single project teams will combine requirements, technology and evaluation, procurement, and logistics functions. Approval procedures will be simplified, with two not three key decision points, to allow greater responsiveness to technological change. These changes should mean faster, cheaper, and better procurement and in-service support.

Substantial savings have already been made by reforming support, including new Defence Agencies and more private sector involvement. These efforts will continue. Further emphasis will be placed on a joint approach, as in operations. Merging all Service logistics into one organization under a Chief of Defence Logistics will facilitate further rationalization. New Agencies will be responsible for storage and distribution of all non-explosive stores and repair and overhaul of all military aircraft. A new Defence Transport and Movements Organization will control large-scale movements of personnel and materiel. Major savings will be made by reducing stockholdings and defense real estate.

DEVELOPING THE EUROPEAN SECURITY AND DEFENSE IDENTITY (ESDI)

The United Kingdom is committed to fairer burdensharing between Europe and North America, by ensuring Europe can speak with a single, authoritative voice on key international issues and intervene effectively, where necessary. Europe's CFSP is being improved with new instruments like a planning staff and a High Representative to ensure policy is more coherent and better implemented. Europe must also develop the ability to act independently when the United States is unable or unwilling to participate.

One element of this is implementing the ESDI within NATO, for example, by developing the Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) concept to allow Europe to make better use of Alliance assets. A further requirement is proper European decisionmaking structures. Since October 1998, Britain has led a new effort on this, looking at measures such as streamlined institutions and for the first time including defense ministers, with the expertise they bring, in EU discussion of security issues.

The United Kingdom has long recognized, however, that more efficient institutions are far from a sufficient condition for a stronger European contribution. As Tony Blair said in November 1998, "Europe needs genuine military operational capability and political will. Without these, we will always be talking about an empty shell." The modernization of U.K. armed forces set out in the SDR offers improved military capability and a model for others. The United Kingdom is also strengthening military ties with other Europeans (e.g., by new links between European air forces and between U.K. and French national headquarters) that build on recent bilateral operational cooperation in Bosnia.

The central principles of the U.K. approach are that this work should not undermine or duplicate NATO and should be conducted in partnership with NATO members not in the EU. In this way a stronger Europe, more able and committed to action, will be a stronger partner for the United States while also strengthening NATO.

PRINCIPAL SDR CONCLUSIONS

Joint capabilities

New Joint Rapid Reaction Forces (JRRF), able to mount simultaneously two brigade-sized operations to high-intensity combat

New Royal Navy/RAF fixed wing force – Joint Force 2000 – to operate from land and aircraft carriers

New Joint Battlefield Helicopter Command, encompassing all battlefield helicopters and providing force packages to operational commanders

New Deployable Joint Force Headquarters, greater powers for the Chief of Joint Operations, and new Joint Defence Centre to develop doctrine

Strategic capabilities

Retaining four Trident submarines, but with a reduced stockpile of 200 operationally available

warheads and 58 missile bodies

Improved strategic lift, including four additional Ro-Ro ships and four new C-17s or equivalent

Enhanced logistic support, including 2,000 new combat support posts and two new Joint Force Logistic Component headquarters

New nuclear, biological, chemical (NBC) reconnaissance organization and enhanced biological and chemical detection and decontamination equipment

Single Service capabilities

Introducing two larger, more versatile aircraft carriers, able to operate up to 50 fixed wing aircraft and helicopters;

Fitting all attack submarines to fire Tomahawk missiles

Updating escort and attack submarine fleets, leading toward introduction of the Horizon air defense frigate early in the new century

Maintaining specialized brigade-sized landing force and amphibious shipping, including a new landing platform helicopter and two replacement landing platform docks

Maintaining two deployable Army divisions, with size of regular infantry unchanged, and eight existing tank regiments reconfigured into six larger regiments

Converting the airborne brigade into a mechanized role, making a total of six armored and mechanized brigades to allow a more balanced operational cycle

Converting the air-mobile brigade into a highly mobile, powerful, air maneuver brigade with parachute capability and Apache attack helicopters

Restructuring the Territorial Army (Reserves) from a force of formed units at low readiness to a smaller but more deployable force closely integrated with Regular forces

Confirming Eurofighter order and conducting further Future Offensive Air System studies

New missiles for Eurofighter and Tornado, including Beyond Visual Range Air-to-Air Missile, Brimstone anti-armor missile, and Storm Shadow long-range cruise missile

JOINT RAPID REACTION FORCES

A key theme of the SDR is greater emphasis on joint activity. The United Kingdom already has a Permanent Joint headquarters and Joint Rapid Deployment Forces. The SDR marks a significant further step in this direction.

The JRRF will spearhead Britain's modernized, rapidly deployable, and better-supported front line. Force packages will be assembled from a pool of powerful, versatile units from all three Services for all short-notice military tasks. The JRRF will have more punch and protection than the existing Joint Rapid Deployment Force, as well as improved strategic transport, operational logistics, and medical services, and deployable command and control.

The JRRF should be operational by 2001. Its first echelon, held at very high readiness, would allow early entry operations and an initial military capability. It could provide a maritime task group, air power, lead battle groups of land and amphibious forces, and special forces, under a fully equipped, rapidly deployable headquarters. A second echelon would provide further naval and air forces to allow substantial combat operations, and a land force which could comprise a commando, air-mobile, armored, or mechanized brigade.

FORCE LEVELS

Force Element	Previous Plans	Post-SDR Plans
Aircraft Carriers	3	3
Amphibious Ships	8	8
Attack Submarines	12	10
Destroyers and Frigates	35	32
Minewarfare Vessels	25	22
Royal Marine Commando	3.5	3.5
Armored and		
Reconnaissance Regiments	11	10
Artillery Regiments	15	15
Engineer Regiments	11	13
Equipment Support Battalions	6	7
Armored Infantry Battalions	8	9
Mechanized Infantry Battalions	4	6
Light Infantry Battalions	25	22
NBC Regiment	-	1
Royal Logistics Corps		
Regiments	8	7
Airborne Early Warning Aircraft	6	6

Maritime and Reconnaissance		
Aircraft	23	23
Air Defense Aircraft	100	87
Offensive Air Support Aircraft	177	154
Support Helicopters		
(Chinook equivalents) 63 63	63	63
Transport and Tanker Aircraft	78	82

Michael O'Neill is a British foreign service officer currently assigned to the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. He wrote this article during a three-month attachment as a Visiting Fellow at INSS. Further information, including the full white paper and essays on specific issues, are available on the U.K. Ministry of Defence website at www.mod.uk/policy/sdr/index.htm.

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